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### **Commonplacing and Originality: Reading Francis Meres**

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#### ABSTRACT

Francis Meres (1565-1647) is remembered chiefly for the survey of 'English poetry' that he offers in *Palladis Tamia* (1598), which includes a number of laudatory comments on Shakespeare. Since the 1930s, scholars have known that this seemingly original critical intervention is a tissue of unacknowledged quotations, stitched together from the works of others. As well as identifying the main source for the *Palladis* for the first time, this article uses evidence from a number of books that Meres owned and annotated, and draws on the epitaph that he wrote for his wife, to ask what reading might have meant to an author who was incapable of speaking with his own tongue.

For all its modern associations with leisure and pleasure, reading is a fraught activity. The legacy of the great world religions of the book, and the specific impact of Protestantism with its valorisation of the vernacular Bible; the growth of silent, private reading, which allowed authors to speak directly to the souls of their readers; the development of literary genres towards (seemingly) ever more stringent forms of ethical discrimination; the burgeoning of canons and standards of taste that emphasized the dangers of reading 'the wrong sort of thing' and which underwrote hierarchies of social distinction and cultural capital; the growth of mass literacy, and the idea of culture as a surrogate for the seemingly waning power of religion; and the invention of literary studies, intensifying the demand for interpretative subtlety: all of these factors have turned reading into a test of one's mettle.<sup>1</sup> The scene of reading has been idealized and demonized so many times, in so many different ways, that it comes as something of a relief to be reminded (by a critic such as Leah Price) that most of our reading is not like that—that we read cereal packets and juice-cartons, hoardings and road-signs, restaurant menus and political flyers with little of the strenuousness that we invite our students to display in the face of a poem by Emily

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Furedi, *Power of Reading: From Socrates to Twitter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Dickinson.<sup>2</sup> The history of reading has in recent decades started to teach us how much of our reading is non-reading, and how much of it would be better understood if we replaced the idea of reading with the idea of book use, which might be multiple, practical, and fragmentary rather than tied to an ideal of the whole and organic.<sup>3</sup> Concomitant with this change of perspective is a certain displacement of the modern conception of reading as a private, inward act, a meeting of minds. This for me is the force of the celebrated article by Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine on ‘How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy’.<sup>4</sup> How did he read? Not privately, silently, ruminatively, but in company, purposively, politically, and materially, with pens, paper, large tables, and perhaps massive pieces of furniture in the room (the celebrated book-wheel). Reading becomes a matter not just of the material text (although Harvey leaves us a rich harvest of annotated books) but of material environments, the stage-sets within which it takes place. Post-romantic reading needs *its* stage-sets, its props, its environments, just as much as other modes; but the imaginaries at work are quite different.<sup>5</sup>

All of that said, it is sometimes hard to throw off one’s purism—one’s sense of the depths of human engagement that can open up in the act of reading—and to move across to a more disenchanted, pragmatic sense of what reading is. As a lecturer in a Faculty of English I spend a lot of time teaching Shakespeare, whose plays are intricately concerned with the ethics of personal and political relationships, and seem to make huge demands on their interpreters. The careful layering of ironies in these texts, their calculated undecidabilities, the endless nuances of their language, everything further complicated by archaism, adaptation, remediation—all of this fuels many hours of debate during the average term, and similar things could be said for many other great writers. Yet the classroom itself is of course an environment and a stage-set. However intimately they engage us, we talk about texts together amid a particular architecture of rooms and corridors and chairs and tables, and with a clear pragmatic purpose in mind: the passing of exams which will mostly pave the way to

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<sup>2</sup> Leah Price, *How To Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Carla Mazzio and Bradin Cormack, eds, *Book Use, Book Theory: 1500-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy’, *Past and Present* 129 (1990), 30-78.

<sup>5</sup> On reading’s evolving *mise en scène*, see Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006). On furniture, physical and mental, see Jeffrey Todd Knight, “‘Furnished for Action’: Renaissance Books as Furniture’, *Book History* 12 (2009): 37–73.

teaching qualifications or law conversions or jobs in journalism or advertising. This is 'book use', for sure, although we might not be able to see it clearly, thanks to the mystification of the relationship between an interpretation of *King Lear* and an ability to carry out this or that job.<sup>6</sup> All of this is to suggest that there is a conflict between the roles that we play as literary critics and as historians of the book. This conflict colours the analysis that follows: an exercise in reading a reader which cannot but implicate our prejudices and presuppositions about what reading might mean and perhaps ought to mean.

My starting point is a set of comments on Shakespeare, some of which have become oft-quoted and even celebrated. 'As the soule of *Euphorbus* was thought to liue in *Pythagoras*: so the sweete wittie soule of *Ouid* liues in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakespeare*, witnes his *Venus* and *Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c.' 'As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so *Shakespeare* among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for Comedy, witnes his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Loue labours lost*, his *Loue labours wonne*, his *Midsummer night dreame*, & his *Merchant of Venice*: for Tragedy his *Richard the 2. Richard the 3. Henry the 4. King Iohn, Titus Andronicus* and his *Romeo and Iuliet*.' 'As *Epilus Stolo* said, that the Muses would speake with *Plautus* tongue, if they would speak Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with *Shakespeares* fine filed phrase, if they would speake English'.<sup>7</sup> These elegant soundbites all come from *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury* (1598), the most famous work of Francis Meres. Meres's life story is easily told.<sup>8</sup> He was born in Lincolnshire in 1565, and matriculated at Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1584, graduating MA in 1591; in 1593 he was incorporated MA at Oxford. In 1596-8 he published a rash of works: a sermon on marriage, three translations of devotional writings by the Spanish Dominican, Luis de Granada, and the *Palladis Tamia*. After this brief outburst, he entered the priesthood, becoming rector of Wing in Rutland in 1602 and remaining there until his death in 1647. The relative tranquillity of his life contrasts with the debates that have raged about him since his death, all thanks to his having offered one of the earliest laudatory 'reviews'

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<sup>6</sup> For a genealogy of this mystification, see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 201v-2r.

<sup>8</sup> See *ODNB*, 'Meres, Francis (1565/6–1647), writer and translator'.

of Shakespeare, a review that has been known to scholars since the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

Before we launch into those debates, it is important to say something about the context of Meres's comments. *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasury* is a 325-page long duodecimo collection of similitudes ranged under commonplace headings. The headings are organized according to a diffuse logic. We begin with God, Christ, The Holy Ghost, Heauen, Angels, The Church, Preachers, Sermons; then we slide downhill to Man, Women, the soul, the mind, the heart; and to the cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance. While there appears to be some thematic grouping, there are also remnants of alphabetical order in the arrangement of headings, which frequently fall into clusters such as 'Benefits', 'Benevolence', 'Businesse' or 'Emulation', 'Exhortation', 'Endeuour'; this suggests that the collection was originally organized as a commonplace book in which the headings ran from A to Z.<sup>10</sup> What we find under Meres's headings are comparisons, hundreds of them. 'As no man knowes where his shoe wringes him, but hee that hath it on: so no man knowes the disposition of a woman, but he that hath married a wife'. 'There is a certaine hearbe in India of an especiall savour, full of little serpents, whose stinges are present death: so the courts of certaine Princes hath that which delighteth, but unlesse thou be warie, they harbour deadly poyson.' 'As fire cannot be without heate, nor the Sunne without light: so a iustifying Fayth cannot be without iustifying workes'. 'As the beautie of a whore dooth allure: so the garishnesse of the world doth entice'. 'Flies feed upon ulcers: so Lawyers upon discord'.<sup>11</sup> And so on. Some but by no means all of these quotations are attributed, whether to classical authors (Seneca, Plutarch, Cicero, Pliny), to religious authorities (Bede, Basil, Chrysostom), or to contemporary literature—John Lyly's *Euphues*, Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*, Harington's *Ariosto*. There are also a good many citations from the works of Luis de Granada, suggesting that Meres was gathering material for his *Palladis* as he undertook his translations from Spanish.

About 250 pages in to this Sargasso Sea of similitude, we turn to conspicuously intellectual subjects: first 'wit', which leads on to 'Bookes' and

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Richard Farmer, *An Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: J. Woodyer, 1767), 89.

<sup>10</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, X2v-4v, X8r-8v.

<sup>11</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, G1v, 2E7r, L3r, 2H7v, 2G6v.

‘Reading of bookes’, and from there we go on to ‘Philosophie’, ‘Philosophers’, ‘Poetrie’, and ‘Poets’. It is at this point, with no prior warning, that we find the set-piece that has attracted all the scholarly attention: ‘A comparative discourse of our English Poets, with the *Greeke, Latine, and Italian Poets*’.<sup>12</sup> What goes on in this section of the text is a different kind of similitude from those we’ve seen earlier. ‘Comparative’ here means matching up Greek and Roman writers with a roster of English authors who are in some way akin to them. It is an exercise in historical speed-dating in which Orpheus, Linus and Musæus pair up with Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate, Homer looks like a good fit with Piers Plowman, Ovid gets to share a table with Harding the chronicler, and so on. The matchmakings are often completely absurd, bathetic or both: try, for example, ‘As *Euripedes* is the most sententious among the Greek Poets: so is Warner among our English Poets’.<sup>13</sup> Yet although these couples will mostly not want to take their relationships any further, it is nonetheless hard not to feel that something historic is going on here. This is a validation of the vernacular which is all the more powerful because it is a bit desperate, based on a lot of casting around in dark corners for obscure authors. ‘As Italy had *Dante, Boccace, Petrarch, Tasso, Celiano and Ariosto*: so England had *Mathew Roydon, Thomas Atchelowe, Thomas Watson, Thomas Kid, Robert Greene & George Peele*’.<sup>14</sup> Meres must really have his ear to the ground, we might suppose, in order to know about so many second-, third- and fourth-division authors.

In recent criticism, admiration for Meres has been running high. In particular, Meres is an important figure in the work of Lukas Erne, who has been concerned to demonstrate that Shakespeare was not just a man of the theatre, but was also attentive to his reputation in manuscript and print.<sup>15</sup> In Erne’s account, *Palladis Tamia* is a crucial index to Shakespeare’s rising status on the bookstalls. Calling the book ‘a fascinating attempt at the formation of an English literary canon *avant la lettre*’, Erne notes that Meres ‘praises Shakespeare several times and positions him near the top of the English literary canon alongside Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton and Warner’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, 2N7r.

<sup>13</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, 2O1v.

<sup>14</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, 2O2v.

<sup>15</sup> Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 89; idem, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 23.

<sup>16</sup> Erne, *Literary Dramatist*, 89; idem, *Book Trade*, 23.

Moreover, according to Erne, this happens at a significant moment, when Shakespeare's plays ceased to be published anonymously: 'The year 1598 had witnessed the massed arrival of Shakespeare's name on playbook title pages, and his consecration as an English author of the first order in Meres's *Palladis Tamia*'.<sup>17</sup> Erne floats the possibility of a causal link between these two events, the arrival and the so-called 'consecration'. Perhaps it was because Meres had given him such emphatic praise that Shakespeare could finally be marketed as Shakespeare.

In a similar vein, the textual critic MacDonald P. Jackson has proposed that Meres's 'Comparative discourse' itself influenced a whole swathe of writing by Shakespeare.<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare, Jackson imagines, would have been flattered to find himself lauded so highly (he was, it turned out, the equal of Ovid, Plautus and Seneca). But Meres also lavished praise upon Shakespeare's rivals—writers such as Marlowe, Chapman and Jonson—and this may have stoked the jealousies that surface in the rival poet sonnets. Jackson claims to find a host of verbal echoes of the *Palladis* across the Shakespearean canon, in *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and other plays.<sup>19</sup> Meres's claim that Marlowe had been 'stabbed to death by a bawdy serving-man, a rival of his in his lewd love' is supposedly answered in *As You Like It*, when Rosalind tells Orlando that 'men have died from time to time—and worms have eaten them—but not for love' (4.1.84-5).<sup>20</sup>

A third critic who has recently been drawn to Meres is Katherine Duncan-Jones, who in 2009 published a short note entitled 'Francis Meres, Playgoer'.<sup>21</sup> Here Duncan-Jones explores a comparison made in the section on women in the *Palladis* between Thisbe and Juliet: 'As trusty *Thisbe* did goare her gorgeous body with the

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<sup>17</sup> Erne, *Book Trade*, 86; *Literary Dramatist*, 92-3.

<sup>18</sup> MacD. P. Jackson, 'Francis Meres and the Cultural Contexts of Shakespeare's Rival Poet Sonnets', *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 56/224 (2005), 224-46.

<sup>19</sup> Jackson, 235-9. Several of Jackson's claims about the significance of word proximities in Meres and Shakespeare can now be rapidly disproved by EEBO-TCP word searches. Thus, for example, Shakespeare's use of the word 'countenance' in relation to patronage (235-6) turns out to be a commonplace, not a borrowing from Meres. The collocation made in Sonnet 85's 'precious phrase by all the Muses filed' and *Palladis*'s claim that 'the Muses would speak with *Shakespeares* fine filed phrase, if they would speake English' (*Palladis*, 202r; Jackson, 236) is anticipated by George Turberville's *Tragicall Tales* (1587), 2B5v: 'Though diuers write with fuller phrase, / and farre more hawty stile: / And burnish out their golden bookes / with fine and learned file. / Yet meaner Muses must not lurke / but each in his degré / That meaneth wel, and doth his best / must wel regarded be'. Other words shared by Meres and Shakespeare, such as 'poetical' and 'mellifluous' were, as Jackson suspects (239), demonstrably 'in the air'.

<sup>20</sup> Jackson, 235. Jackson here is developing ideas first proposed by Jonathan Bate and Charles Nicholl.

<sup>21</sup> Katherine Duncan-Jones, 'Francis Meres, Playgoer', *Notes and Queries* 56 (2009), 579.

same sworde, wherewith princely *Pyramus* had prickt himselfe to the hart: so true harted *Iulietta* did die vpon the corps of her dearest *Romeo*'.<sup>22</sup> Duncan-Jones suggests that Meres is here drawing on his experience of seeming Shakespeare's plays in performance, since *Midsummer Nights Dream* had not yet been printed. Exploring in detail how Meres echoes Shakespeare's language, Duncan-Jones proposes that his comments may tell us something about the staging of Juliet's death. Unfortunately, however, Meres's words are anything but a personal response to a live performance; in fact, they are an almost verbatim repetition of a passage from George Pettie's *Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure* ('Did true *Thisbe* goare her gorgeous body with the same sworde, wherewith princely *Piramus* had prickt him selfe to the hart: and are not my handes stronge inough to do the like? Did *Iulietta* die vpon the corps of her *Romeo*, and shall my body remayne on earth, *Synnatus* beyng buried?')<sup>23</sup> As it happens, Meres cites Pettie after his next excerpt. And here, as we shall see, lies a particular rub.

To see what is going on in this instance, we have to go back to 1933, when Don Cameron Allen edited what he called Meres's 'treatise' on poetry.<sup>24</sup> Here he summarized Meres's posthumous reputation in sharply polarized terms. On the one side were those who called Meres 'acute', 'keen-witted', 'a learned and thoughtful writer', 'a writer of genius', and who routinely claimed that he was a Professor at Oxford or Cambridge in order to bump up his credentials. On the other, Allen identified an equally vociferous crew of doubters, who called Meres 'naive', 'quite childish', 'a mere compiler, of no great learning or critical judgment', a 'dullard'.<sup>25</sup> Allen saw the positive assessments as essentially partisan—'the majority of scholars, in their desire to increase the reputation of Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser, Kyd, and Jonson, have laboured to increase the reputation of Francis Meres, the critic who had a laudatory word for all his writing contemporaries'.<sup>26</sup> He himself signed up with the nay-sayers.

This he did this by offering a comprehensive demolition of Meres's pretensions to first-hand knowledge of classical literature. In early modern grammar

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<sup>22</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, G7v-8r.

<sup>23</sup> George Pettie, *A petite pallace of Pettie his pleasure* (London:R. Watkins, 1576), D2v.

<sup>24</sup> Don Cameron Allen, ed., *Francis Meres's Treatise "Poetrie": A Critical Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1933).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



schools and universities, he pointed out, the classics were often encountered via florilegia, such as the *Officina* of Joannes Ravisius Textor or the *Polyanthea* of Domenico Nani Mirabelli. Allen showed that Meres had ransacked such florilegia for all of his statements about ancient poetry. The citation that precedes one of the praises of Shakespeare—‘As Epius Stolo said, that the Muses would speake with Plautus tongue, if they would speake Latin’—is a straight translation from the Latin of Textor. Many of Meres’s judgments about modern poetry were shown to be equally derivative, having been copied word-for-word from treatises by Roger Ascham, Philip Sidney, George Puttenham and William Webbe.<sup>27</sup> Allen combs through the *Palladis* in extraordinary detail, presenting the borrowings in parallel texts:

*MERES*

As Homer is reputed the Prince of  
Greek Poets; . . .  
As Homer was the first that adorned the  
Greek tongue with true quantity: . . .

As Xenophon, who did imitate so excellently, as to give us effigiem iusti imperii, the portraiture of a iust Empyre under the name of Cyrus (as Cicero saith of him) made therein an absolute heroicall Poem; and as Heliodorus writ in prose his sugred invention of that picture of Love in Theagines and Cariclea, and yet both excellent admired Poets: . . .

As Virgil doth imitate Catullus in ye like matter of Ariadne for his story of Queene Dido: . . .

*WEBBE*

which because I grounde upon Homer, the Prince of all Poets.  
and indeede the regarde of true quantity in Letters and syllables seemeth not to have been much urged before the time of Homer in Greece, as Aristotle witnesseth.

*SIDNEY*

For Xenophon, who did imitate so excellently as to give us effigiem iusti imperii, the portraiture of a iust Empyre under the name of Cyrus (as Cicero sayth of him) made therein an absolute heroicall Poem.  
So did Heliodorus in his sugred invention of that picture of love in Theagines and Cariclea; and yet both these writ in Prose: . . .

*ASCHAM*

and how Virgil him selfe in the storie of Dido, doth wholie Imitate Catullus in the like matter of Ariadna; . . .<sup>28</sup>

Even statements that appear to be personal, first-person judgements turn out to be filched:

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19-44.

<sup>28</sup> Allen, pp. 34-5.

*MERES*

so Skelton (I know not for what great worthines, surnamed the Poet Laureat) applied his wit to scurrilities and ridiculous matters, such among the Greeks were called Pantomimi, with us Buffons.

*PUTTENHAM*

... then in king Henry th' eight times Skelton (I wot not for what great worthines) surnamed the Poet Laureate. Skelton a sharpe Satirist, but with more rayling and scoffery then became a Poet Lawreat, such among the Greekes were called Pantomimi, with us Buffons, altogether applying their wits to Scurrillities and other ridiculous matters.<sup>29</sup>

The *Palladis* stands revealed as a tissue of citations, and Meres as an utterly inauthentic reader, his seemingly authoritative first-hand judgments obtained by theft rather than honest toil. Crucially, Allen failed to find sources for the comments on Shakespeare that constitute the interest of the book for modern readers; his work leaves open the possibility that these are exceptions to the general rule. Still, having presented 'the full debtor's account', Allen felt licensed to conclude that the *Palladis* was 'the product of an intellectual conspiracy against originality', and Meres a man well behind his time, his 'medievalism ... obvious in his pedantry and servile use of authority'.<sup>30</sup>

Needless to say, nobody would talk in these terms any more. Renaissance scholars no longer use 'medieval' as a term of abuse, and they entertain far more complex ideas about textual property in an age before copyright.<sup>31</sup> Allen sees himself as indicting not just a single individual, but an entire educational system which 'sanctioned a method of imitation and borrowing that was little better than plagiarism'. What he calls the 'short-cut method' is what we know as commonplacing—the practice of culling pithy nuggets of text from one's reading.<sup>32</sup> Students in the humanist classroom, following time-honoured classical and medieval practices, were enjoined to imitate the industrious bee that flies through the whole garden of literature, sipping nectar from the choicest blooms. The excerpts that they culled from their reading were to be digested—ranged under headings—and used to supply materials

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 58, 60.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Loewenstein, *The Author's Due: Printing and the Prehistory of Copyright* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Allen, 28.

for argument and ornament in the student's writing, oratory, and everyday speech. A number of studies, including important books by Mary Thomas Crane and Ann Moss, have pointed out the sheer ubiquity of commonplacing in the period, and have discussed its role in facilitating the transfer of classical authority to a culture with radically different mores.<sup>33</sup> Such studies have tended to see commonplacing as reflective of wider intellectual trends or as culturally symptomatic, but more recent criticism has found something to celebrate in the practice of commonplacing. The work of Juliet Fleming and of Adam Smyth in particular has taught us to think about commonplacing as a kind of cutting and pasting, and as one version of the excerption that is involved in all reading.<sup>34</sup> As they have reminded us, the Latin verb 'legere' meant not just 'to read', but also to gather or pluck, to choose or select. For Fleming, drawing on Derrida, it is cutting and grafting that (whilst superficially destructive) opens up the possibility of new growth.<sup>35</sup>

In my account thus far, Francis Meres has presented a paradox: here is a high priest of unoriginality, producing a recycled book for others to recycle, who nonetheless puts together something distinctly original, a vision of a literary canon in which English works stand as rivals to the classics, and in which one author in particular lords it over the rest. The ongoing revaluation of commonplacing may offer one way of resolving that paradox, allowing us to see the *Palladis* as splicing new scions onto classical stocks. Another route, which I wish to explore in some detail, lies in his surviving books. Those books are now scattered across the Peterborough Cathedral Library, which has been deposited at the Cambridge University Library since 1970. The strength of the Peterborough collection is that it is remarkably unconserved; most of the books were acquired in the early eighteenth century and they survive in their original bindings, warts and all. What light might Meres's books shed on his cultural identity, and on what reading meant for him?

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Adam Smyth, "'Shreds of Holinesse': George Herbert, Little Gidding, and Cutting Up Texts in Early Modern England", *English Literary Renaissance* 42 (2012), 452-81; Juliet Fleming, 'The Renaissance Collage: Signcutting and Signsewing', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45 (2015), 443-56.

<sup>35</sup> Fleming, 'Renaissance Collage', 450-4.

After much searching, I have so far identified fifteen books that definitely belonged to Meres in the Peterborough Cathedral Library.<sup>36</sup> There are plenty of other books in the collection that might have belonged to him—not least a first edition of *Palladis Tamia*, and copies of his translations—but for these we lack solid evidence.<sup>37</sup> It is also likely that some of Meres's books have disappeared from the collection over time, not least in the first decade of the twentieth century when more than 200 books were stolen from Peterborough.<sup>38</sup> We do not know how any of the books came into the Cathedral's collection, but the likelihood is that they arrived in the early to mid-eighteenth century, when they were dispersed across a range of classmarks.<sup>39</sup> In terms of their dates of publication, the books run from 1532 to 1606, but in terms of their life in Meres's hands, they divide into two groups. The first, comprising just two books, was bought while he was student at Pembroke College, Cambridge, between 1587 and perhaps 1591.<sup>40</sup> The second (the rest of the books) was acquired between 1599 and 1617, during which period Meres was (perhaps) disengaging from London and settling down as vicar of the village of Wing in Rutland. This means that the books miss out on the phase we want to know about—what we might call 'the London years', when Meres was going to the theatre and avidly reading Shakespeare and Spenser, Drayton and Nashe. (Or when, alternatively, he was cribbing snippets from Textor, Ascham, Sidney, Puttenham and Webbe).

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<sup>36</sup> Thanks to Sophie Defrance, Emily Dourish, Ed Potten and Dunstan Roberts for helping me to search the bookstacks. There is another book that may have belonged to Meres, Pet. C.6.4, a copy of his translation of Luis de Granada, *The Sinners Guyde* (London: Paule Linley and John Flasket, 1598); the signature of 'Hen. Meres', in a late seventeenth- or eighteenth-century hand, has been preserved on a flyleaf during conservation. A Henry Meres, perhaps the son of Francis Meres junior (1607-1683), was rector of South Luffenham, Rutland, in 1680 (Leicester RO, DE 452/2). I have identified just one Meres book outside the Peterborough collection: George Abbot, *A Briefe Description of the Whole World* (London: John Browne, 1600), now Folger, STC 25. My thanks to Heather Wolfe and Elizabeth DeBold for information about this book.

<sup>37</sup> *Palladis Tamia* is Pet. F.5.50. In addition to Pet. C.6.4, the library has a second copy of *The Sinners Guyde*, Pet. F.1.39, and a copy of *Granados Devotion* (London: E. Alde for Cuthbert Burby, 1598), Pet E.4.35.

<sup>38</sup> See the two copies of C. A. Gordon's *List of Books Stolen from Peterborough Cathedral Library* (Cambridge, 1910), Cambridge University Library Adv.c.104.30, Adv.c.111.1. Among the books stolen were titles by Puttenham, Spenser and Nashe.

<sup>39</sup> On the history of the library, see J. J. Hall, ed., *Peterborough Cathedral Library: A Catalogue of Books Printed Before 1880* (Cambridge: University Library, 1986), iv-ix. The Meres books bear the old classmarks that were brought in after 1725; these were deleted and replaced in the mid-nineteenth century (ibid., vi-vii).

<sup>40</sup> Pet. C.6.30, a copy of Gabriel Harvey, *Rhetor* (London: Henry Binneman, 1577) and other works; Pet C.9.47, a copy of Polydor Vergil's *Adagiorum opus* (Basel: Io. Bebel, 1532) bound with idem, *De rerum inventoribus libri octo* (Basel: Io. Bebel, 1532).

The books also divide into two groups in terms of physical format. On the one hand, there are volumes bound in calf, usually blind-tooled with a roll, a panel or a centrepiece. These are almost all books that our doyen of the second-hand bought second-hand. On the other, there are books bound in vellum—meaning usually a piece of ill-fitting, recycled sheepskin that was crudely stab-stitched through the text block. These bindings, possibly homemade, are now often hanging by a thread or are completely disconnected from the book.<sup>41</sup> They are found on titles that Meres seems to have bought new. What can we infer from this? One obvious possibility is that Meres did not have much money. He had entered Pembroke as a sizar, the poorest grade of student, in 1584, and it was as a sizar that his son would matriculate at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1625. An alternative interpretation would be that he was buying books for use rather than show. But recent research suggests that stab-stitching was a very common form of binding in this period, and that many books now found in more elaborate bindings spent an earlier phase of their lives stab-sewn. So perhaps we should not infer too much.<sup>42</sup>

What of the content of the books? The first thing to say is that the collection does contain some florilegia that seem quintessentially Meres. There is the *Adagia* of Polydor Vergil, like Erasmus's *Adagia* a collection of proverbs in Latin with commentaries. There is a theological anthology stuffed with extracts from Augustine and Chrysostom, with a handy thematic index.<sup>43</sup> There are books for the preacher, including a treatise on Christian ethics by Lambert Daneau, professor of theology at the Genevan academy, and a compendium of marriage and funeral sermons by the Basel pastor Johann Brandmüller.<sup>44</sup> We also find several works of religious controversy and a Lutheran chronicle.<sup>45</sup> Then there are items that connect up with the more 'literary' side of Meres's identity. These include the Gabriel Harvey volume, a

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<sup>41</sup> For an unattached book-block, see Pet. G.6.12, comprising Robert Some, *A Godly Treatise ... Touching the Ministerie, Sacraments, and Church* (London: George Bishop, 1588) and idem, *A Godly Treatise, Wherein are Examined and Confuted Many Execrable Heresies* (London: George Bishop, 1589). Among the cheapest bindings are those on Pet. A.4.45, William Covell's *A modest and reasonable examination* (London: Clement Knight, 1604) and Pet. A.3.19, *A True and Perfect Relation*. My thanks to David Pearson for his comments on these bindings.

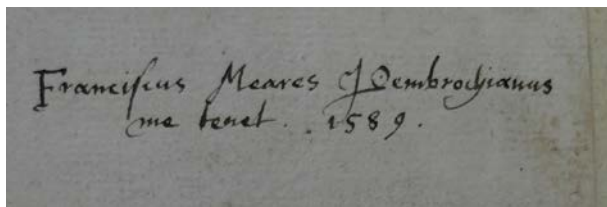
<sup>42</sup> Aaron T. Pratt, 'Stab-Stitching and the Status of Early English Playbooks as Literature', *The Library*, 7<sup>th</sup> ser., 16 (2015), 304-28.

<sup>43</sup> Pet. C.9.47, Vergil, *Adagiorum*; Augustine and Chrysostom, *Theologia* (Halaë Svevorum: Peter Braubach, 1539).

<sup>44</sup> Pet. C.5.16, Lambert Daneau, *Ethices christianae libri tres* (Geneva: Eustache Vignon, 1577); Pet. B.1.43, Johann Brandmüller, *Conciones funebres* (Basel: Konrad von Waldkirch, 1596), bound with *Conciones nuptiales* (Basel: Konrad von Waldkirch, 1595).

<sup>45</sup> Pet. C.1.52, Johannes Carion, *Chronicorum libellus* (Francoforti : ex officina Petri Brubachii, 1543).

sammelband which brings together three works by Harvey, followed by a book of Cambridge elegies for Sir Philip Sidney.<sup>46</sup> Meres the student may have been interested in Harvey, but the *Palladis* takes a pot-shot at him: ‘As *Achilles* tortured the deade bodie of *Hector*, and as *Antonius*, and his wife *Fulvia* tormented the livelesse corps of *Cicero*: so *Gabriell Harvey* hath shewed the same inhumanitie to *Greene* that lies full low in his grave’ (Meres goes on to praise Harvey’s antagonist, ‘sweete *Tom*’ Nashe).<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the most obviously literary volume in the heap is Charles Fitz-Geffrey’s *Affaniae* (1601), a collection of epigrams and elegies that also offers a kind of survey of contemporary authorship, including poems to Thomas Campion, Ben Jonson, Josuah Sylvester, and Mary Sidney.<sup>48</sup> It may be relevant that Meres explicitly mentions Fitz-Geffrey in the *Palladis*, praising his poem on the life and death of Drake.<sup>49</sup> Other telling presences in this collection are two copies of a sixteenth-century neo-Latin poem, Palingenius’s *Zodiacus vitae*, in Latin and in English translation.<sup>50</sup> In the *Palladis Tamia*, Meres added a reference to Palingenius to a list of authors that he was otherwise copying out of Textor.<sup>51</sup> So here is a case where his cutting or grafting does seem to result from a personal enthusiasm.



<sup>46</sup> As well as *Rhetor* this volume (Pet. C.6.30) contains Harvey’s *Ciceronianus* (London: Henry Binneman, 1577) and *Smithus; vel musarum lachrymæ* (London: Henry Binneman, 1577), followed by *Academiae Cantabrigiensis lachrymæ* (London: Thomas Chard, 1587).

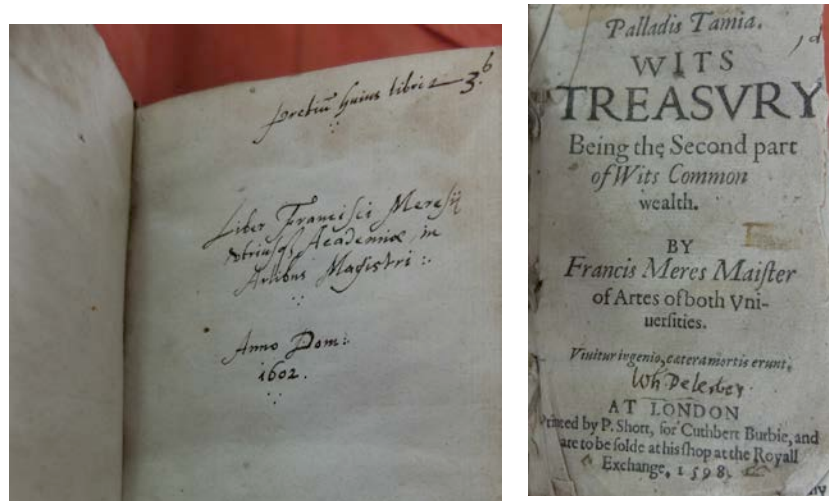
<sup>47</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, 206r-v.

<sup>48</sup> Pet. E.3.39; *Caroli Fitzgeofridi affaniae* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1601).

<sup>49</sup> *Palladis*, 205v.

<sup>50</sup> Pet. F.2.68, *Marcelli Palingenii, ... Zodiacus vitae* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1574); Pet. G.3.12, *The Zodiake of Life*, trans. Barnabie Googe (London: Robert Robinson, 1588).

<sup>51</sup> Allen, 35.



One of the most striking things about the books is the way in which Meres lays claim to them, which changes considerably over time. The callow student at Pembroke has a constricted way of marking ownership; the published author, ‘utriusque Academiae in artibus magister’ and later ‘rectoris de Winge’ and ‘sacri verbi concionatoris’ [rector of Wing and preacher of the holy word], proclaims his status with a flourish in a fine italic hand. The location of signing varies; sometimes Meres writes on the title-page, sometimes on a flyleaf or pastedown, or directly onto the vellum covers.<sup>52</sup> But the underlying model is clear: Meres disports himself in his books just as he did on his printed title-pages. For scholars of Elizabethan literature, Meres’s ostentation echoes that of Robert Greene, who paraded his joint MAs in his publications of the early 1590s. We have already seen the *Palladis* defending Greene’s reputation; the work innovated by setting the likes of Greene and Lyly alongside Seneca and Plutarch as sources for its excerpts. So Meres’s way of marking ownership helps to bridge the gap between his brief literary life and his later rustication.

<sup>52</sup> One of the books has a marginal note in Meres’s hand but no ownership inscription; this is Pet. G.1.40, Morton, *Full Satisfaction*. It is likely that provenance evidence was destroyed when the book was rebound in the twentieth century. Pet. E.3.39 (Fitz-Geffrey, *Affaniae*) has only a faded signature of ‘Franciscus Meres’ (possibly in the hand of Francis Meres the younger) on the front-cover vellum.



These books are also demonstrative about the circumstances of their purchase. Alongside the price, Meres regularly notes places and circumstances of purchase. One book was bought at a degree ceremony in Cambridge on 1 July 1617; the very day that one Dr Beridge got his MA.<sup>53</sup> Cardinal Bellarmine's *Disputationes* was bought from Simon Tunn, minister of Gunby, Lincolnshire, on 2 December 1599. The same book was marked out decades later as a gift from Meres to his son, who was following his father into the ministry: 'Pater dedit Filio September 7. 1636'.<sup>54</sup> The two copies of the *Zodiacus Vitae*, one in Latin, one in English, are both marked 'Franciscus Mere / filius'—bought for his son. The oddest case is his copy of the *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, a notorious work of Protestant resistance theory, which discussed the circumstances in which it was permissible to kill a king. Meres acquired his *Vindiciae* from a local woman, writing blithely on the second front flyleaf: 'Bought this book of goodwyfe Cole of Tighe upon the 5. daye of November. 1605 for-----6.<sup>d</sup>.<sup>55</sup> It is quite a coincidence that he should have bought this incendiary text

<sup>53</sup> Pet. C.5.16, Daneau, *Ethices*. William Beridge matriculated as a sizar at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1610 and was Rector of Great Catworth, Huntingdonshire, at the time of his death in 1637. Clergy of the Church of England Database (<http://theclergydatabase.org.uk>), person ID 138123.

<sup>54</sup> Pet. L.4.5. Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes* (Ingolstadt: David Sartorius, 1587), inscribed on a printed-waste front flyleaf: 'Liber Francisci Meresij emptus a M. Simone Tunno Ecclesiæ Gunbiensis Ministro tertio Die Decembris. Anno Dom: 1599. Apud Coulsterworthe'. Simon Tunne matriculated as a sizar at Christ's College, Cambridge in 1576 and proceeded BA in 1578-9; he went on to hold a variety of ecclesiastical offices in Lincolnshire. See Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, and the Clergy of the Church of England Database, person ID 153278.

<sup>55</sup> Pet. F.5.13, *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos* (Edinburgh [i.e. Basel: T. Guarinus?], 1579). The identity of 'goodwyfe Cole' is elusive, but she may have been the wife of one Nicholas Cole, who is listed along with William Fowler as a churchwarden of Teigh, Rutland, in 1601-2, during the period when Meres makes a fleeting appearance in the Parish Register first as a churchwarden and then a curate of the





Meres was also given to writing notes about each book on its flyleaves. Typically, what he jotted down was a series of gleanings of other people's judgments on the author, particularly where the author was (as in the case of the *Vindiciae*) unknown, or (as in the case of Bellarmine) controversial. On a front flyleaf of the *Vindiciae*, he pulled together references to the work from three different publications, including John Donne's 1610 *Pseudo-Martyr*; the commentary, which was partly a guessing-game as to the text's authorship, continued on the rear flyleaves.<sup>57</sup> On the back of the title-page of *Disputationes*, Meres took a vox pop about Bellarmine from a variety of English divines. He was 'prince of the Jesuites' and 'the papists Pythagoras', but he was also a man 'more painefull then learned'—or so somebody else said.<sup>58</sup> Such gleanings might be viewed as a standard form of bibliographical engagement; the desire to identify and to know something about an author was widespread in the age before national biographies and short-title catalogues. They might alternatively rekindle our sense that Meres was pathologically unoriginal. They recall moments in *Palladis Tamia* where Meres does not merely appropriate someone else's writing, but instead explicitly cites a second-hand opinion. 'As *Epius Stolo* said, that the Muses would speake with *Plautus* tongue, if they would speak Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with *Shakespeares* fine filed phrase, if they would speake English'. Or again: 'As *Sophocles* was called a Bee for the sweetnes of his tongue: so in *Charles Fitz-Iefferies Drake*, *Drayton* is termed *Golden-mouth'd*, for the purity and

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<sup>57</sup> The works cited at the front of the book are William Watson, *A Decacordon of Ten Quodlibeticall Questions* (London: Richard Field, 1602), Q2v; *The ansvere of the vicechancelour* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1603), B1r; and John Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr* (London: Walter Burre, 1610), B1r. A later hand joins in on the title-page, adding a reference to John Moore, *Of Patience and Submission to Authority: A Sermon* (London: R. Royston and Walter Kettilby, 1684), D3r-v. In the rear flyleaves Meres cites Jean Boucher, *De iusta Henrici Tertii abdicatione* (Lugduni: Joannes Pillehotte, 1591), C2v, R3v, R7v; Thomas Stapleton, *Apologia pro Rege Catholico Philippo II* (Constantiae [i.e. Antwerp?]: apud Theodorum Samium, [1592]), R3r; William Reynolds, *De justa reipublicae Christianae* (Antwerp: J. Keerbergius, 1592), A4v; Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationum ... de controuersiis Christianae fide*, 4 vols (Lutetiae Parisiorum: A. Tiffaine, 1620), vol.1, pp. 879-94, sigs. 2E4v-8r; Matthew Pattenson, *The image of bothe churches* (Tornay: Adrian Quinque, 1623), G5r; Matthew Sutcliffe, *An ansvere to a certaine libel supplicatorie* (London: Deputies of Christopher Barker, 1592), M3r; James I, *A remonstrance of the most gracious King James I* (Cambridge: Cantrell Legge, 1616), 2P3r-v (Meres's page reference suggests that he was using an edition of 1619, STC 14371); Richard Bancroft, *A suruay of the pretended holy discipline* (London: John Wolfe et al., 1593), 2I3v.

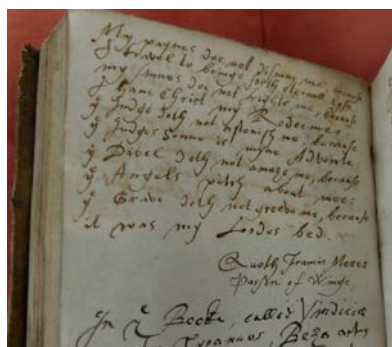
<sup>58</sup> These judgments are taken from John Rainolds, *The summe of the conference betwene Iohn Rainoldes and Iohn Hart* (London: George Bishop, 1584), B6r; Francis Dillingham, *A dissuasiue from poperie* (Cambridge: John Legat, 1599), A5v; William Barlow, *An ansver to a Catholike English-man* (London: Mathew Law, 1609), G4v. Meres also cites Philip Woodward, *A detection, of diuers notable vntruthes, contradictions, corruptions, and falsifications* (London: publisher unknown, 1602), +4v and William Whitaker, *Disputatio de sacra Scriptura* (Cambridge: Thomas Thomas, 1588), A3r.

pretiousnesse of his stile and phrase'.<sup>59</sup> Here second-handness is positively flaunted, as Meres at once asserts himself and busily defers authority: as x said this of y, so I say this of z. Perhaps the effect of this is to create a kind of polyphony, or an echo-chamber; it is only possible to pass judgment if someone else has done so already, just as it is only possible for an English author to excel in the manner in which a classical author has already excelled. Yet Meres proves just as capable of cutting and pasting secretively, as when he transcribes a miniature testament of his faith on a rear flyleaf of his *Vindiciae*:

My paynes do not dismay me, because  
 I travel to bringe forth eternall lyfe:  
 my sinnes doe not frighte me, because  
 I haue Christ my Redeemer:  
 the Iudge doth not astonish me, because  
 the Iudges sonne is myne Advocate:  
 the Diuel doth not amaze me, because  
 the Angels pitch about mee:  
 the Grave doth not greeue me, because  
 it was my Lordes bed.

Quoth Francis Meres  
 Parson of Winge<sup>60</sup>

Francis Meres, parson of Wing, may be saying it; but thanks to searchable digital texts we can establish that his miniature prose-poem credo is drawn from a published sermon by the popular preacher Henry Smith.<sup>61</sup> Does it matter whether you merge your voice with another's openly and ostentatiously, or quietly and surreptitiously?

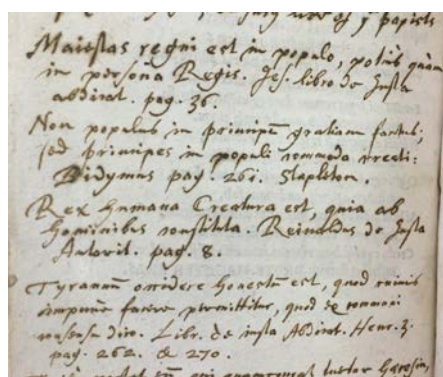
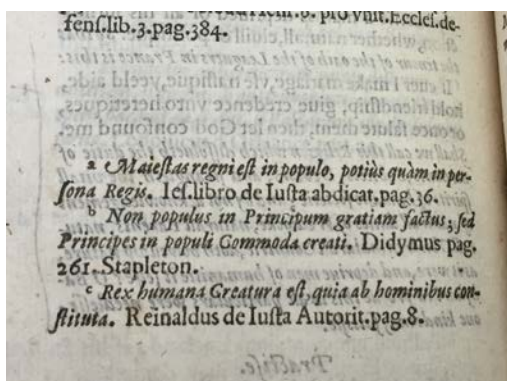


fer for God. My paines doe not dismay mee,  
 because I trauaile to bring forth eternall life,  
 my sinnes doe not fright me, because I haue  
 Christ my redeemer, the iudge doth not asto-  
 nish me, because the Iudges sonne is my ad-  
 uocate, the diuel doth not amaze me, because  
 the Angels pitch about me. The graue doth  
 not grieue me, because it was my Lords bed.  
 Oh that Gods mercv to me, might mooue o-

<sup>59</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, 202r, 201r.

<sup>60</sup> Pet. F.5.13 (*Vindiciae, contra tyrannos*), third rear flyleaf verso (counting inwards from the covers).

<sup>61</sup> The text is printed in Henry Smith, *Three prayers* (London: Thomas Man, 1591), B3r-v; it was reprinted in *The sermons of Maister Henrie Smith gathered into one volume* (London: Thomas Man, 1593), 3T3v. Meres's text more closely resembles the former.



At times, in these flyleaf annotations, Meres does both at once. While he might appear to be citing the views of a about b—a task which, one imagines, would have involved him in extensive reading—he is in fact citing the views of a about b as quoted by c. Thus on the rear flyleaves of his copy of the *Vindiciae*, he takes three Latin formulations of the idea that the power of kings lies in the people from a single page of a single book by Thomas Morton entitled *An exact discoverie of Romish doctrine*; other materials are drawn from pages close by.<sup>62</sup> He has not himself personally consulted the books by Bellarmine, Rainolds, Stapleton or Boucher that he cites, but has instead drawn them from a pre-existing compilation.<sup>63</sup> The intermediary work is nowhere acknowledged; like Textor's *Officina* it plays the role of the florilegium.

It would be neat and tidy if we could say that these books offer no evidence at all for Meres *actually reading*, confirming a notion of his disengagement from the analysis of texts. We might judge that his children were more interested in scribbling in his books, or that bookworms were more engaged in eating them, than he was in reading them.<sup>64</sup> But this censorious route is not open to us, since Meres's non-reading is itself always a kind of reading; he reads others in order to extract their opinions of texts and authors. Sometimes it is possible to see this practice moving beyond the flyleaves and out into the margins of a book. Thus his book on the Gunpowder Plot, *A True and Perfect Relation*, bears no annotations beyond a few scattered pencil marks. But in the midst of this substantial volume, as Sir Edward Coke is arraigning Father Garnet, Meres adds a marginal note:

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Morton, *An exact discoverie of Romish doctrine in the case of conspiracie and rebellion by pregnant obseruations* (London: C. B[urby] and E. W[eaver], 1605), B4v; D3v, E4v.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., A2v.

<sup>64</sup> Pet. A.4.45 (Covell) is marked with youthful graffiti, including 'Francis Meres his booke' and 'Thomas Meres his book' in the same hand on sigs H4v, R2v and [2]F4v. For wormhole damage see the pastedowns of Pet C.5.16 (Daneau).

Bishop Andrews in / his Booke sett forth 1609. / against Tortis pag:  
 228. / sayth: profectò, in Chartis / Garnetti, quæ repertæ sunt, / in toto  
 sermone nihil vsquam / reconditæ eruditionis: Bac= / chum enim certè  
 magis redo= / lebat, quàm Appolinem. / Garnettus quàm sæpè, non /  
 sobrius, nimis multis notum. / Reade this 228. page of / doctor  
 Andrewes, & see / how he disableth Garnett / both for life & learninge;  
 / and is against Sir Edwarde / Cookes Commendation.<sup>65</sup>

These interventions are interesting partly because they are akin to the weighing of opinions that occurs on Meres's flyleaves. Here, however, the stakes are raised by the clash of Andrewes' negative judgment with Coke's claim that Garnet has 'many gifts and endowments of nature, by Art learned, a good Linguist'.<sup>66</sup> We are very clearly in the realm of controversy, not of fixed and authoritative judgments. Meres makes a similarly unexpected intervention on page 75 of Thomas Morton's *A Full Satisfaction concerning a double Romish Iniquitie*, beside a discussion of the oration made by Pope Sixtus V in praise of the monk who had assassinated Henri III of France:

The Churche of / Rome denyeth that / Sixtus Quintus ever / made any  
 such Oration, / eyther in Consistorie / or els where. Father / Parsons in  
 his Warn= / worde pag: 103. & / Francis / Walsingham / in his Seache  
 / made into / matters of / Religion / part 3. ca: / 6 page / 393.<sup>67</sup>

Here there is still more obviously a matter in dispute. Perhaps Meres, the translator of Luis de Granada, sympathized with his Catholic authors at this point; or perhaps he was contributing to the ideological battle, and attempting to strengthen the Protestant case at a point of perceived weakness. Whichever it was, this is not a 'servile use of authority'.

Meres may not have made detailed textual annotations on his books, but the longer we study them, the more the binary between reading and non-reading, first-hand engagement and second-hand recycling begins to feel inadequate. Citation looks purposeful, and recycling looks like hard work, a kind of text-mining that is

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<sup>65</sup> Pet. A.3.19 (*True and Perfect Relation*), T1v. ['Indeed, in Garnett's papers, those which were gathered together, in the whole discourse there is nothing anywhere of hidden wisdom; truly he smelled more of Bacchus than Apollo.']; cf the very similar note on Z4r. Lancelot Andrewes, *Tortura Torti: sive, ad Matthaei torti librum responsio* (London: Robert Barker, 1609), 2F2v.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., T1v.

<sup>67</sup> Pet G. 1. 40 (Morton, *Full Satisfaction*), L2r.

intrinsically laborious.<sup>68</sup> We might extend this observation from the ‘comparative discourse of our English Poets’ to the *Palladis* as a whole, if we start to search for the sources of Meres’s innumerable similes. Inevitably, it turns out that he has *not* personally combed through all of the church fathers and classical moralists that he cites in order to cull his nuggets of wisdom. While a proportion of his comparisons come from the works of Luis de Granada and from modern English writers, the vast majority derive from a single florilegium, the *Loci communes similium et dissimilium* of Jean Dadré of Rouen (c. 1550-c. 1617), first published in 1577. This work is conspicuous by its absence from the list of ‘Authours both sacred and profane, out of which these similitudes are for the most part gathered’ which prefaces the *Palladis*, and it has not hitherto been identified as Meres’s primary source.<sup>69</sup> But while Meres frequently follows the sequence of this massive anthology as he culls his similes from it, he is highly selective in his choice of materials for translation. He also breaks up the alphabetical order of his original as he brings his own order (or disorder) to the commonplace headings of the *Palladis*. Even before we take into account his splicing-in of new materials, the labour of selection, translation and reorganization that Meres undertook in remodelling Dadré for an English readership was formidable. The ‘short-cut method’ required considerable effort.

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After a burst of translating, epitomizing and publishing between 1595 and 1598, Meres became Parson of Wing in 1602. It is not quite true, however, to say that he wrote nothing after this time. In the Leicestershire Record Office, there is a manuscript volume recording births, marriages and deaths for the parish of Wing, commencing in 1625.<sup>70</sup> Meres procured the parish register and opened it with an utterly characteristic series of flourishes:

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<sup>68</sup> Meres’s copy of Bellarmine’s *Disputationes* (Pet. L.4.5) does contain tiny marks of intensive reading throughout, including a repertoire of crosses, gnomic markers, and internal and external cross-references. These appear to be the work of another early reader.

<sup>69</sup> Jean Dadré, *Loci communes similium et dissimilium* (Paris: Guillaume Julian, 1577). Even the title of the list of authors in *Palladis* (A2r) is translated from Dadré: ‘Autores tum sacri, tum prophani, ex quibus similia et dissimilia deprompta sunt’ (\*10r). Meres also draws extensively on the *Liber de exemplis ac similitudinibus rerum* of Johannes de Sancto Geminiano (c. 1260?-c. 1333?), but he cites this author directly.

<sup>70</sup> Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, MS DE 1846/1 (unpaginated).

The Register Booke of Winge  
in the Countye of Rutlande  
of all the Christninges, Wed=  
dings and Burialls.

Beginninge at the yeare of our  
Lorde God 1625.

And at the first yeare of the  
Raigne of our Soveraigne  
Lorde Kinge Charles, the  
first of that Name.

Anno Inductionis Francisci Meres  
vtriusque Academiae in Artibus Magistri  
in Rectoriam de Winge Vicesimo  
Tertio.

This Register Booke was bought at  
Cambridge, & cost \_\_\_\_\_ 11s.

Mr Francis Meres, Master of Artes  
of Trinity Colledge in Cambridge  
(only son of Francis Meres Rector  
of Wing) student than at Cambridge  
& scholler then of that House, bought  
it of Mr Henrye Moodye a  
Bookeseller, dwellinge at the Greene Dragon.

Francis Meres the Father a licensed  
Preacher, Master of Artes of both Vniuersities  
beinge then Parson of Winge:

Richard Allen and Hugh Sharpe beinge then Churchwardens of  
Winge.

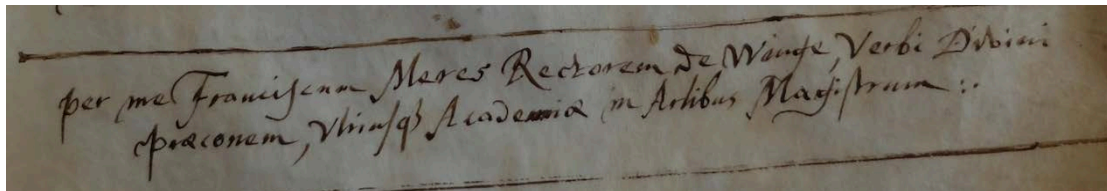
As with the inscriptions in Meres's books, this is florid, verging on the grandiose, and somewhat grotesque in the way that it filches in a reference to Francis junior's Cambridge career. In the heading for each year, Meres takes the opportunity to mention how long he has been in the job, and to recall that he is a master of arts of *both* universities. In 1646, the political climate begins to impinge and he rounds off his headnote with a poem, which might (just possibly) be all his own work:

Full Fowrescore yeares are gonne and past



Since I aliue haie beene;  
But yet suche Evill Dayes as These  
Myne Eyes haue never seene.

This is almost the last entry in Meres's hand in the manuscript; at the bottom of the same page is the notice of his own death and burial.



But the most conspicuous intrusion that Meres makes in the parish register is the four-page tribute that he pens in 1631, on the death of his wife. Before this threnody gets going, it is nearly dragged off course by the year's other big family disaster:

Annus luctuosus, funestus, fatalis, infestus, infaustus, infortunatus [a sorrowful, disastrous, fatal, disturbed, unlucky, unfortunate year]: A Dismall yeare for my deare wyfes Deathe: and my deare Sonnes missinge of a Fellowship in Trinity Colledge in Cambridge (there beinge no Election throughe the Deathe of Doctor Brookes the Maister dyinge iust at the Election tyme, & so, No Maister, No Election, otherwise he had bene sure of one) yeeldes matter to be deliuered in Threnes, or Elegyes, and Accents of Lamentation & Complaint./

But then we are back to Mary:

This is She, whose presence made me happye, and whose Absence Vnfortunate:. That which Suetonius in his Historie sayth of Augustus Caesar his loue to his wife Livia Drusilla: Her he loued entyrelly, Her he liked onely, and to the verye Ende: The same say I of my deare Wife Mistris Mary Meres: Her I loued enturelye, Her I liked onely, and to the very Ende:.

Even here, as Meres is remembering his wife in what might seem to us a touching way, the praise has to be extrapolated via the words of others. This happens several times in the account. Sometimes it is just a matter of competition with Biblical and classical figures:



Never Mother loved Childe more dearelye, more tenderly  
 Not the Mother of Zebedees Children; Not Niobe Hers;  
 Not Monica Saint Augustine; Nor Cornelia her Gracchi.

But sometimes it is full-blown *Palladis*-style comparison:

That which Sir Philip Sidney sayde of Argalus and Parthenia  
 I may iustly say of Mye-Selfe and my deare Wyfe:  
     Her beinge was in him alone,  
     And she not being he was none.

Meres reaches for high examples and high words as the only mourning clothes fit for the paragon that was his wife.

As the paean proceeds, we do learn something more particular about Mary Meres; it turns out that ‘She was an excellent Surgeon, for stanching of Bloode, for Bruses, for Woundes, for Burninge or Scaldinge, for sore Eyes, for sicke Women, for Women in labour, for Women in Childbed’. And as we read on, there is also a moving sense that the widower is stringing things out, because breaking off the act of writing means breaking off relations that are ongoing for as long as the memorialization continues:

When She drew neare her Ende, She desyred me; To be carefull  
 here for her Sonne, & that I would let him take no wronge:  
 And that She would make muche of him, when he came to Heaven  
 These were almost her last Wordes.  
 And so I leaue her, till at last, we meete again in Heaven, when we  
 shall never part.  
 But yet I cannot leaue Her: But with this Apostrophe ad  
 Beatissimam, meam Coniugem:

Here Meres launches into some Latin lines asking his wife to return to him; then he copies down the epitaph that is going to be engraved in the chancel of his church. Even then he can’t stop, but has to quote Ovid and Horace on how their writings are a ‘monumentum aere perennius’, a monument more lasting than brass. And then he starts to quote lines that he had earlier included in *Palladis Tamia*, to express the immortality of a host of modern writers:

Non Iovis ira: imbres: Mars: Ferrum: Flamma: Senectus:  
     Hoc opus vnda; lues: turbo: venena ruent.  
 Et quanquam ad pulcherrimum hoc opus avertandum tres illi

Dij conspirabant; Chronus, Vulcanus, & Pater ipse Gentis;  
Non tamen Annorum series, non flamma, nec ensis,  
Æternum potuit hoc abolere Decus.<sup>71</sup>

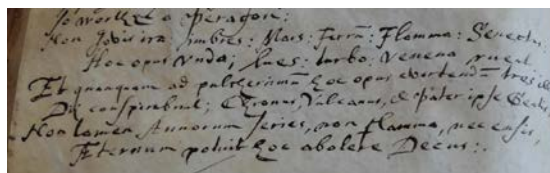
*annorum series & fuga temporum: to say I  
feuerally of Sir Philip Sidneys, Spencers Dani-  
iels, Draytons, Shakespeares, and Warners  
workes;*

*Non Iouis ira: imbres: Mars: ferrum:  
flamma, senectus,*

*Hoc opus unda: lues: turbo: venena ruent.  
Et quanquam ad plucherrimum hoc opus e-  
uertendum tres illi Dij conspirabūt, Cronus,  
Vulcanus, & pater ipse gentis;*

*Non tamen annorum series, non flamma,  
nec ensis,*

*Æternum potuit hoc abolere Decus.*



D. C. Allen quotes these lines to show how Meres engaged in *imitatio*, adapting and embroidering classical statements about literary immortality: ‘this example illustrates one type of imitation which Meres had learned at school’.<sup>72</sup> Once again, an online search reveals a different story. The last two lines of this extract are from a poem on the ruins of Rome written by the twelfth-century poet Hildebert of Lavardin. The last four lines, including the quotation from Hildebert, are taken from the neo-stoic Justus Lipsius’s book on Roman monuments, *De amphitheatro* (1584).<sup>73</sup> So Meres is here quoting himself quoting Lipsius quoting a twelfth-century poet. The whole thing sounds like a pastiche of Horace and Ovid, and none of the debts are acknowledged. Again we are in an echo-chamber, where everyone is saying the same thing in slightly different ways. There is no end to citation, but the citation is nonetheless less deeply felt.

<sup>71</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, 202r-v. [‘Not Jove’s anger, storms, Mars, iron, flame, age / Nor wave, infection, whirlwind, poison shall hurl down this work. / And although to overwhelm the beauty of this work three Gods shall conspire—Cronus, Vulcan and the father of the Gods / Yet not the succession of years, nor flame, nor war / Could destroy this eternal glory’.]

<sup>72</sup> Allen, 29.

<sup>73</sup> See *Hildeberti Cenomanensis episcopi carmina minora*, ed. A. Brian Scott (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1969), 23 (‘De Roma’, ll. 21-2, with ‘ad plenum’ for ‘Æternum’); Justus Lipsius, *De amphitheatro liber* (Antwerp: Christopher Plantin, 1584), B2r.

~~matæ non vno bulfo, euerfæ non vno fato.~~  
 Tres ad pulcherrimum hoc mundi opus euer- Roma fa-  
 tendum dij conspirarunt, Cronus, Vulcanus, pius euerfæ,  
 & pater ipſe gentis. non penit.  
*Non tamen annorum ſeries, non flāma, nec enſis*  
*Æternum potuit hoc abolere decus.*  
 vt antiquus quiſpiam poëta verè ait. Scilicet  
 hæc ipſa ruta & cæſa ſpirant etiam Romam ve- Tacita quæ-  
 terem, & velut ſcintillas emittunt priſci ſplen- dum mar-  
 doris. tas ruinari ſi.  
 Ex parietinis ecce iſtis & ex lapidibus

But the image of the echo chamber ultimately does little to help us make sense of Meres's activities. While there may be some truth in the idea of Meres as a literary kleptomaniac, who fails to live up to any of our standards of alert, engaged and original reading, we should not write him off too quickly. The textual mélange he creates here—of Horace and Ovid, Hildebert and Lipsius, Shakespeare and Warner and Mistress Mary Meres—has something consequential to tell us. Reading and writing are technologies of memory. Commonplacing is a way of optimizing the force of reading and writing as technologies of memory. They do this by materializing language, turning strings of words into physical things that can be stored up in *Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury*. In this regard they are akin to other memory-extending functions of writing, such as the incising in stone of epitaphs, and such as literary canons. From this point of view, it is entirely appropriate that an arch-commonplacer should have been one of the earliest advocates of an English literary canon. Appropriate too that he should have had a beautiful, precise italic hand with which to inscribe his memory on the flyleaves of his books. Words on paper can indeed be a 'monumentum aere perennius', a monument more lasting than bronze.

Mary Thomas Crane writes that commonplaces belong to a version of authorship that was 'inscriptive rather than voice-centred'.<sup>74</sup> But this is a false dichotomy: a commonplace can sharpen your writing, but it can also sharpen your tongue. For the key to Meres's writing, we have to go back to the references to Shakespeare that I began with—especially the first and the third. 'As the soule of *Euphorbus* was thought to liue in *Pythagoras*: so the sweete wittie soule of *Ouid* liues in mellifluous & hony-tongued *Shakespeare*.' 'As *Epius Stolo* said, that the Muses would speake with *Plautus* tongue, if they would speak Latin: so I say that the Muses would speak with *Shakespeares* fine filed phrase, if they would speake English'.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Crane, *Framing Authority*, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Meres, *Palladis*, 201v-2r.

These lines speak of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls, but metempsychosis as an overlaying or sharing of tongues; the soul of Ovid in honey-tongued Shakespeare, the Muses speaking with Plautus' tongue or with Shakespeare's fine filed phrase. Commonplacing is just such an overlaying of tongues, a process in which the dead speak through the living—just as the literary canon, in Meres's account, is a reembodiment of ancient virtue in modern writings. The inevitable reference point here is the anthropologist Alfred Gell, with his theory of art and artefacts as forms of distributed personhood.<sup>76</sup> The dead can live forever, for as long as they can find new voices to embody them, new tongues willing to utter their words.

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<sup>76</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 96-154. I am currently initiating a project, provisionally entitled *The Exuvial Renaissance*, to explore the ramifications of Gell's ideas for early modern literary studies.